

Minutes of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council

JULY 8, 2014

NATURAL RESOURCES BUILDING

1111 WASHINGTON STREET SE

OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON

ROOM 172

10:30 AM – 4:30 PM

Members present: Cathy Baker, Al Black, Heida Deifenderfer, Janelle Downs, Peter Dunwiddie, Cherie Kearney, Norm Schaaf and Wade Troutman; Rob Fimbel (State Parks), Sarah Gage (RCO), Jed Herman (DNR), and Cynthia Wilkerson (DFW)

Members absent: John Banks, Bob Meier, Heather Kapust (DOE)

DNR Staff: Joe Arnett, Patti Bakker, Keyna Bugner, Rex Crawford, Jeanne Demorest, John Gamon, Dave Gordon, DeAnn Johnigk, Renee Mitchell, Curt Pavola, Joe Rocchio, Pene Speaks, Dave Wilderman, and Michele Zukerberg

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order by Chair Kearney at 10:37 AM. All present introduced themselves including new DNR staff attending: Dave Gordon is the Acting Assistant Division Manager for Asset Planning and Transactions and Renee Mitchell, the Pacific Cascade Region Natural Area Manager.

II. Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the March 3, 2013 council meeting were presented for approval. (The draft minutes had been distributed to the council prior to the meeting.)

A motion to approve the minutes of the June 19, 2013 meeting of the Natural Heritage Advisory Council as presented was made by Cathy Baker, seconded by Janelle Downs. The motion passed unanimously.

III. New business

Council Leadership

Chair Kearney announced that she was stepping down from the council. She indicated that she has more time demands from work and family. She also described for other council members the time commitment of chairing including the direct communication with staff, being liaison between staff and the council, and running council meetings.

Later in the day the council revisited the change in council leadership. Kearney suggested that Peter Dunwiddie would be a good candidate for chair of the council. There was a brief discussion and an indication from Dunwiddie that he would be willing to serve in that capacity. *A motion was made by Wade Troutman to elect Peter Dunwiddie as the new chair of the council seconded by Cathy Baker. The motion passed unanimously.*

Natural Heritage Plan update

- **Ecosystem classification protocol**
- **Potential changes and additions to plan elements**

Crawford provided a presentation (see Ecosystems NHC.pptx) regarding ecosystem classification that he and Rocchio have been doing. The intent of the presentation was to indicate work needed to update the ecosystem information in the Natural Heritage database. Crawford indicated some information has been updated but there is a substantial body of work yet to be done. Updating the ecosystem information could be done as part of the next Washington Natural Heritage Plan update. This would allow the program to review plan priorities and incorporate new data. This could result in some changes to the current ecosystem list. One option is to prioritize all systems to the plant association level. This would make the information more consistent with the U.S. National Classification System. The updated information would then be used to set priorities in the next iteration of the plan.

Council members had questions about how the ecosystem information would impact the priorities indicated in the plan, if the classification work would lead to more natural area recommendations, whether the plan is directed just at DNR priorities or applies more broadly across the state, how the council could/should be engaged in the classification work and how that relates to their review of the plan update. There was also discussion about the potential for focusing on the most threatened ecosystems and looking at opportunities for interagency coordination. There was comment that the plant association was the appropriate level of resolution. It was clear from council member's questions and discussion and the number of unknowns indicated by staff that more work is needed to define the approach for this plan update. Herman indicated that he would like to see the plan updated starting July 2015. The council decided to establish an *ad hoc* committee to work with staff on options for update.

Members self-selected to participate in the committee were Heida Diefenderfer, Janelle Downs, Rob Fimbel, and Cynthia Wilkerson.

IV. Old Business

Progress on past recommendations – Acquisitions Report

Johnigk reviewed the acquisitions for natural areas that have been completed since the Council's March 2014 meeting (see handout: Special Lands Acquisitions Update, July 2014). During this reporting period, the Department acquired 6 properties totaling 47.29 acres and successfully spent \$828,000 on land value, using grant funds. Sites added to were Cypress Island NA, Dabob Bay NA, Lacamas Prairie NA, Stavis NRCA, and Trout Lake NAP.

One council member asked how the program was doing spending the grant funds. Johnigk indicated that staff would like to be doing better and that more difficult projects and staff vacancies were contributing to the slower pace. She also indicated that recently hired staff, Patti Bakker, should help.

Natural Heritage Methods

- **Natural Area design – Natural Heritage Plan implementation**

- **Preview of two NAP proposals**

Gamon provided a presentation regarding the process and considerations for the design of a natural area (see Natural Area Design.pptx). Using Lacamas Prairie NA as an example, he reviewed the factors that influence the design:

- NH feature that is being considered, such as a rare plant population;
- Landscape setting including adjacent land use;
- Land owners and managers adjacent to or including the features of interest;
- Partners and stakeholders for a project may also influence what lands are included in the site boundary;
- NH engages an ad hoc council committee for a field review of the site that may include suggestions for boundary options;
- The public process includes communication with all landowners and may also influence what parcels are included or excluded.

The council asked whether any landowner is excluded if they don't want to be included. Staff indicated that they may be depending on the circumstance, including the location and size of their parcel in relation to the overall site design.

Rocchio discussed two potential new NAP proposals, one a very rare domed bog in Jefferson County and a cedar swamp and bog system in Snohomish County (see crowberry_marshcreek_nhac_design.pptx). The intent of the presentation was to provide the council with an example of what Gamon had presented regarding how natural areas are designed. It was also an early heads up about the sites as potential recommendations. There was some discussion about outreach to landowners and potential stakeholders and what the next steps would be for these sites. Staff will let council members know about field visit opportunities as the sites move forward.

NHAC role in setting program priorities

- **Follow up on NHAC/DNR interaction**

Kearney reminded the council about the process that was embarked upon before the budget crisis that included a review of processes for natural area recommendations. Kearney shared her recent conversation with Commissioner Goldmark. She indicated that she feels his confidence in council is low. She suggested that any way of “showing our work” could help demonstrate the thoughtful process that the council goes through when considering natural area and other proposals. There was some discussion that maybe more detailed minutes, perhaps having the Commissioner attend council meetings or portions of meetings concerning the appropriate process might help. There were comments that expectations may be different; that the council is balanced and deliberative; that the council does not take the staff recommendations on face value; the council has the power the Commissioner gives it; and that the council has a statutory role that is directed by the legislature.

The council indicated that they want to know what the Commissioner's expectations are in order to respond appropriately. It was pointed out the early review of projects by the Commissioner could help give the council information about what questions he would like to have answered. The council could:

- Provide options in their recommendations, to give a sense of the issues that were grappled with and the range of member perspectives;
- Include the deliberative points as an initial piece of communication with key questions and options before a final recommendation is forwarded;
- Include a number of developed questions that were asked of staff and answers that demonstrate the deliberative process;
- Make an active effort to have commissioner attend council meetings or field visits;
- Approach the problem iteratively to find a process and communication solution that helps build the relationship between the council and the Commissioner.

Council members also discussed some way to convey how competent and capable the staff is and how much is accomplished with limited resources. They also discussed DNR's role in conservation and the statutory direction to establish priorities for conservation in the state.

Forest Restoration and Management on Natural Areas

- **Revised draft review**

Pavola reviewed the Forest Restoration Discussion document (see handout) that addresses questions brought by council members regarding the Natural Areas programmatic forest management guidelines discussed at the March council meeting. The Council will be making a field visit tomorrow to the Natural Areas Program's first effort at implementing the guidelines at Elk River NRCA. Pavola pointed out what was included in the revised document and referred to a fact sheet developed for the Elk River NRCA project to address questions about why we're removing trees in a conservation area.

The council made comments thanking staff for adding the local outreach component to the guidance and suggested adding in a reference to local plans that support restoration efforts in the planning steps (Topash example). Council members expressed appreciation of the fact sheet and a hope that it would be widely distributed. Baker referred to a restoration network for sharing learning that may be an opportunity to get and provide information about the project.

V. Agency Reports

Recreation and Conservation Office

Gage left meeting early – no report

Department of Ecology

No report

State Parks and Recreation Commission

No report

Department of Fish and Wildlife

Wilkerson reported that a grant submission to the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GNLCC) project was approved. The grant was for implementation of the Arid Lands Initiative conservation strategy implementation. The GNLCC added eastside dry forests to its scope of interest. The department is hoping to get funding through State Wildlife Action Plan for the NH ecosystem update work. DNR and DFW are starting the conversation about how to apply the coarse filter concept to identify priority landscapes to implement collaborative

conservation opportunity. The department is hiring staff to implement work on landscape conservation planning.

Department of Natural Resources

Herman mentioned the recently signed restrictive easement on aquatic bedlands managed by DNR in Hood Canal. The agreement is with the US Navy. He also mentioned staff changes in the Transactions Section and that the department was putting in grants for funding through the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and Non-highway and Off-road Vehicle Activities programs. The department is already prepping for the 2015 legislative session. He also mentioned that Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition is advocating a \$97 million budget appropriations for WWRP.

VI. Natural Areas Program Report - handout

VII. Natural Heritage Program Report - handout

VIII. Overview of tomorrow's field visit to Elk River NRCA forest restoration areas

Pavola and Speaks reviewed transportation and food plans for the day with council members and staff.

Kearney adjourned the meeting at approximately 5:00pm. Council members were given directions to Ramblin' Jack's restaurant for a group dinner. Kearney was presented with a plaque signed by council members recognizing her service on the council.